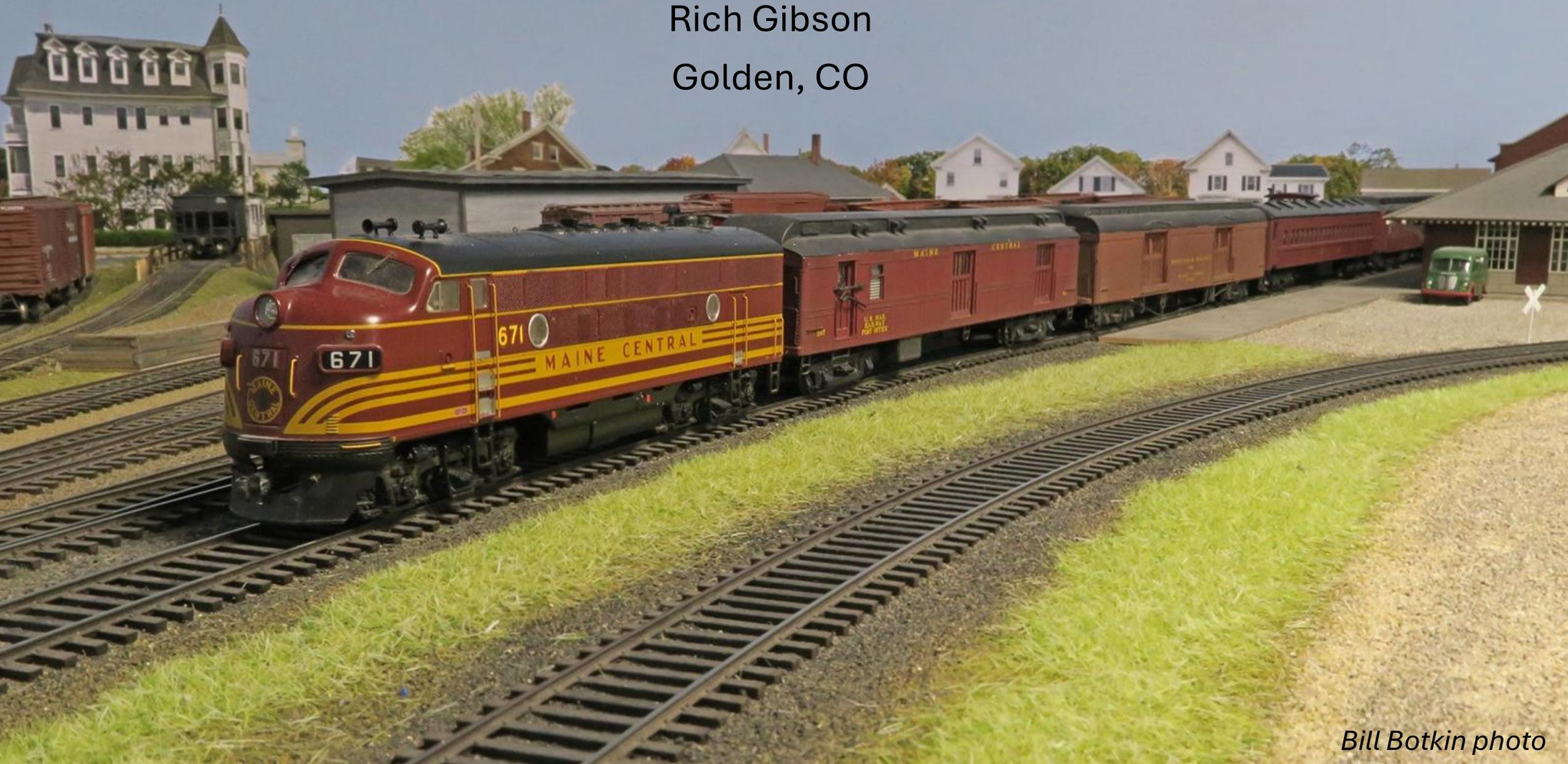


Creating your own photo backdrops

Rich Gibson

Golden, CO



Nothing can make a greater difference in layout appearance than a decent backdrop...



I tried painting....



Presentation outline

- Equipment and timing considerations
- Photography tips
- Laying things out
- Photo editing
- Printing and installation
- A real-time Colorado example

What's needed

- A vision of what you want
- Camera
 - Phone camera
 - Higher-end equipment
- Computer with:
 - Simple presentation software (e.g. PowerPoint, Keynote)
 - Photo editing software (e.g. GIMP, Photoshop Elements, Photoshop)
 - Google Earth, internet access
- Time and patience

Timing of backdrop work

- Either before or after building foreground topography
 - Adding backdrops first lets the backdrop guide the foreground topography
 - **Afterward requires that backdrop conform to foreground topography**
- In either case....do all backdrop work **BEFORE** adding foreground scenery details (vegetation, buildings, etc.)

Photo tips - 1

- Shoot individual photos that can be assembled later into panoramas
- Shoot from near track elevation, generally not from highly elevated positions. If you need to put some distance from the subject, try to stay at a similar elevation.
(Always consider what would you see if you were trackside)
- Overlap photos by at least 1/3 of the image to avoid edge distortion between successive photos
- Focus on objects in the distance, not those close to the camera
- Get photos looking along roads at crossings...they are very useful



Photo tips - 2

- If possible, avoid photographing in conditions with deep shadows



vs



- Avoid mixing distant and close-up objects



Photo tips - 3

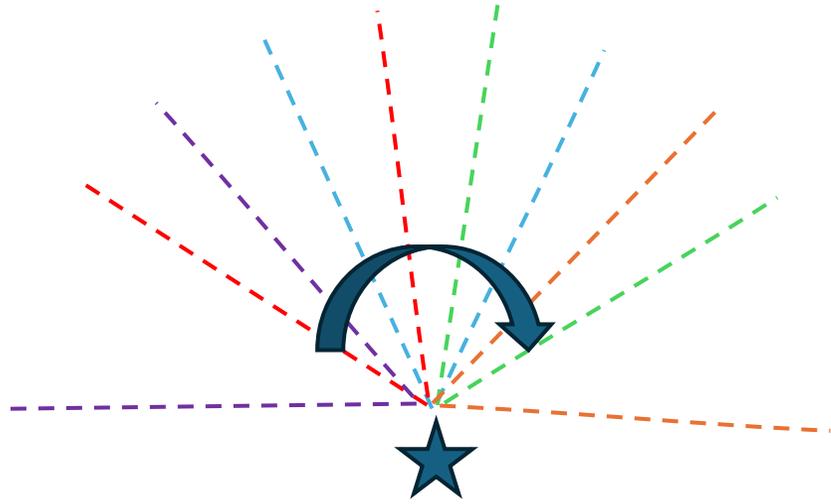
- Take “specialty” pictures....they can be very useful



- And, once you think you have enough pictures, shoot more!

Panorama shooting strategies

Radial

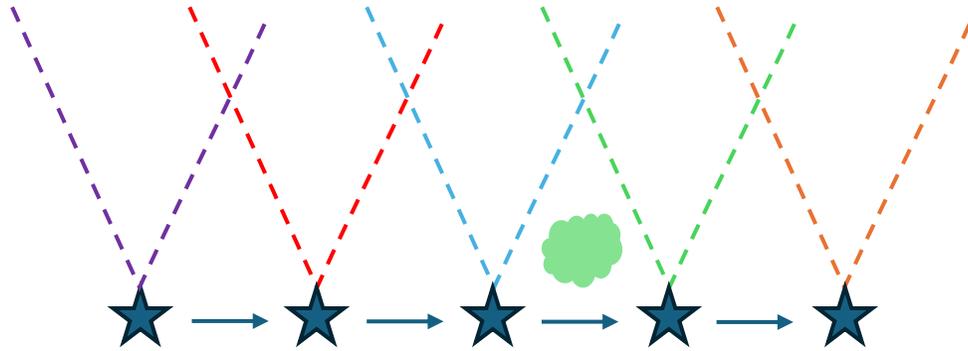


- Sometimes required due to limited access
- Can create an artificial “frown” or “smile” as objects at the ends are farther away
- Ends of the panorama need to be differentially enlarged to match the middle → can lead to resolution loss



Panorama shooting strategies

Lateral

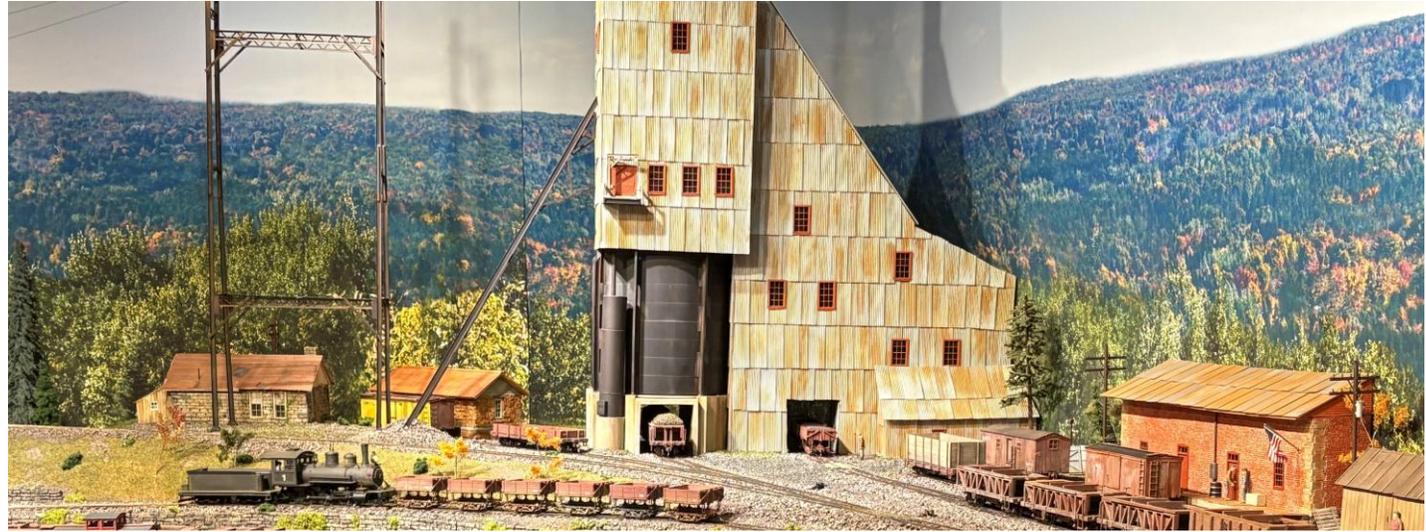


- Best approach if there is sufficient access by walking along trail, road, tracks, etc.
- Can sometimes “shoot around” nearby obstructions (trees, bushes, signs, etc.)



The importance of perspective

A beautiful layout with a stunning backdrop....



But, this is what the modeled area actually looks like!



Perpective 2 – Lisbon Falls, ME

What I thought I needed



What I actually needed



Perspective 3 – La Boca, NM

Original shot from drone
35 feet off ground



Foreground field removed
to get rid of impression of
looking down



Assembling the preliminary panoramas

- Drag images into Powerpoint
- Crop left and right edges of each image until they match
- Once assembled, group into a single picture
- Create one of more files with all of your assembled panoramas
- Remember that some panoramas can be used twice by reversing them!



← 6 images stitched together to create ~2' of final backdrop →



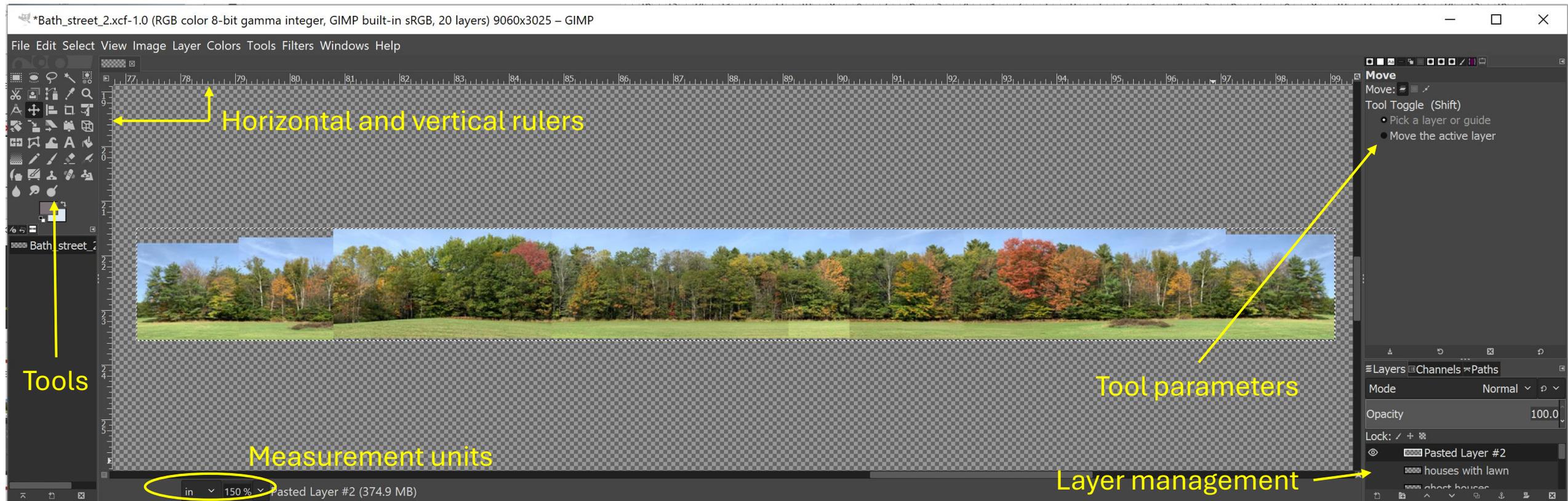
Planning out the backdrop on the layout

- Define a starting point (0") on the layout
- Measure along the backdrop and mark off:
 - every foot from the starting point
 - intersection point of all key scenery features
 - every elevation (vertical) change

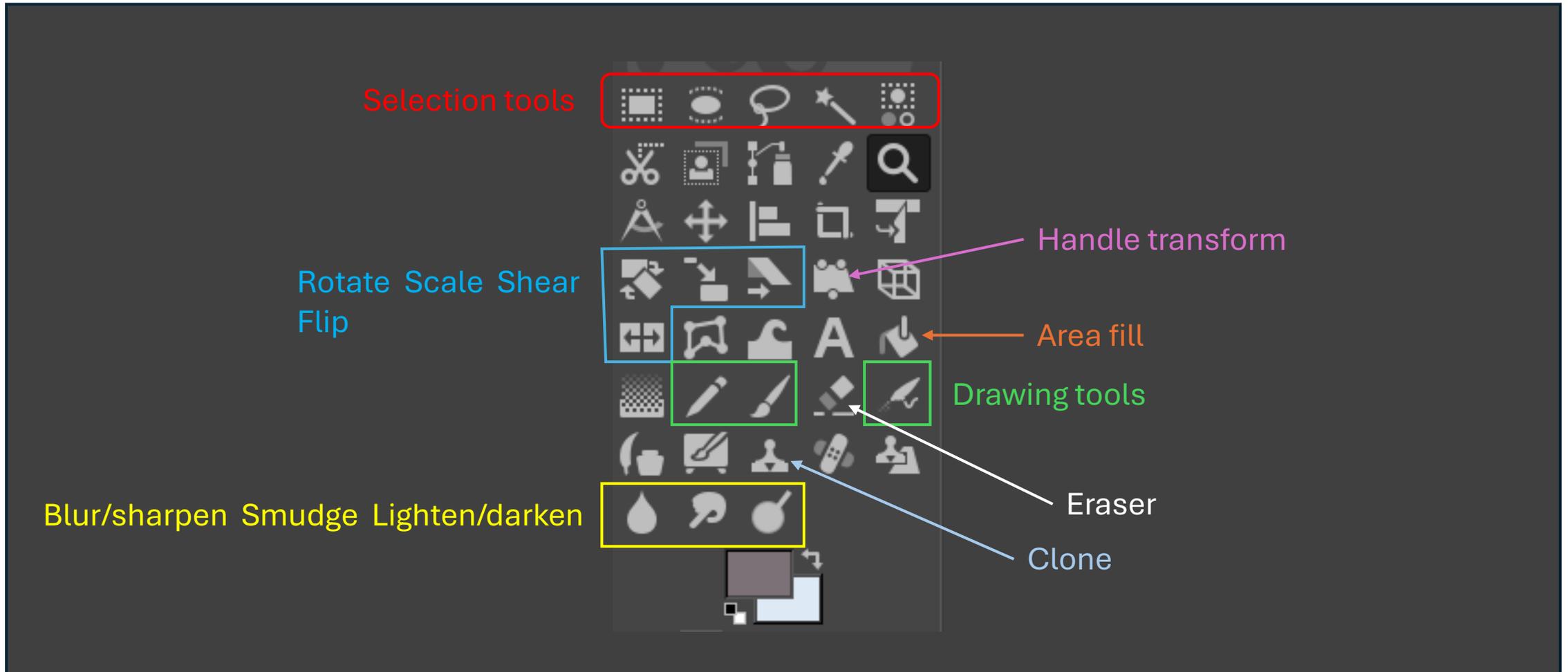


Editing – a backdrop for Bath, ME (1)

- Copy panorama from Powerpoint and paste into GIMP as a new image
- Set the canvas size to at least as long and tall as the final backdrop
- Scale the initial image to correspond with your layout measurements

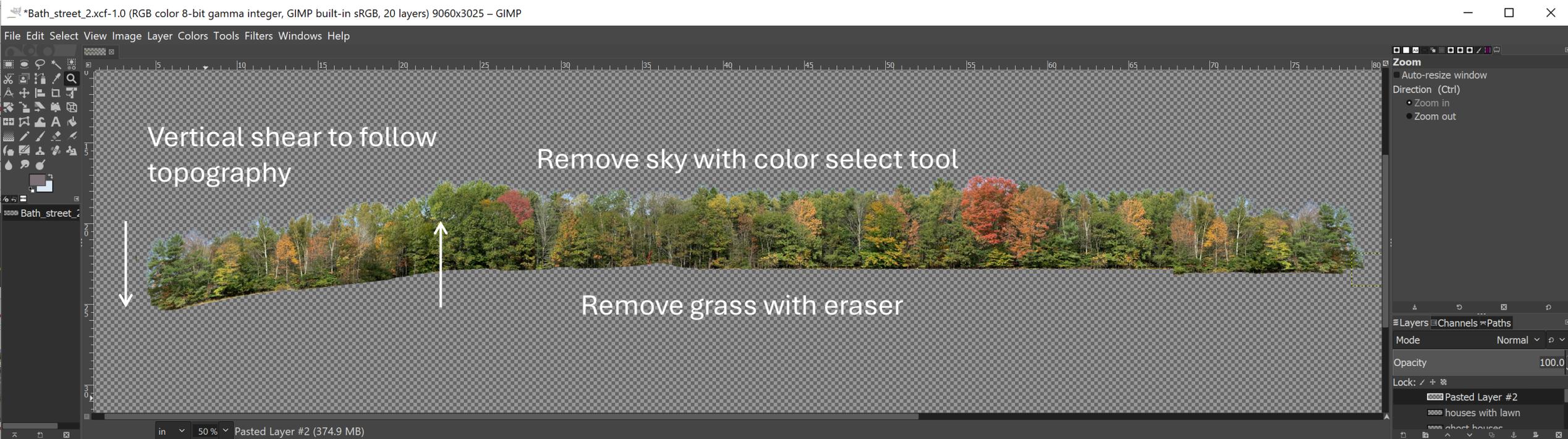


Key GIMP tools



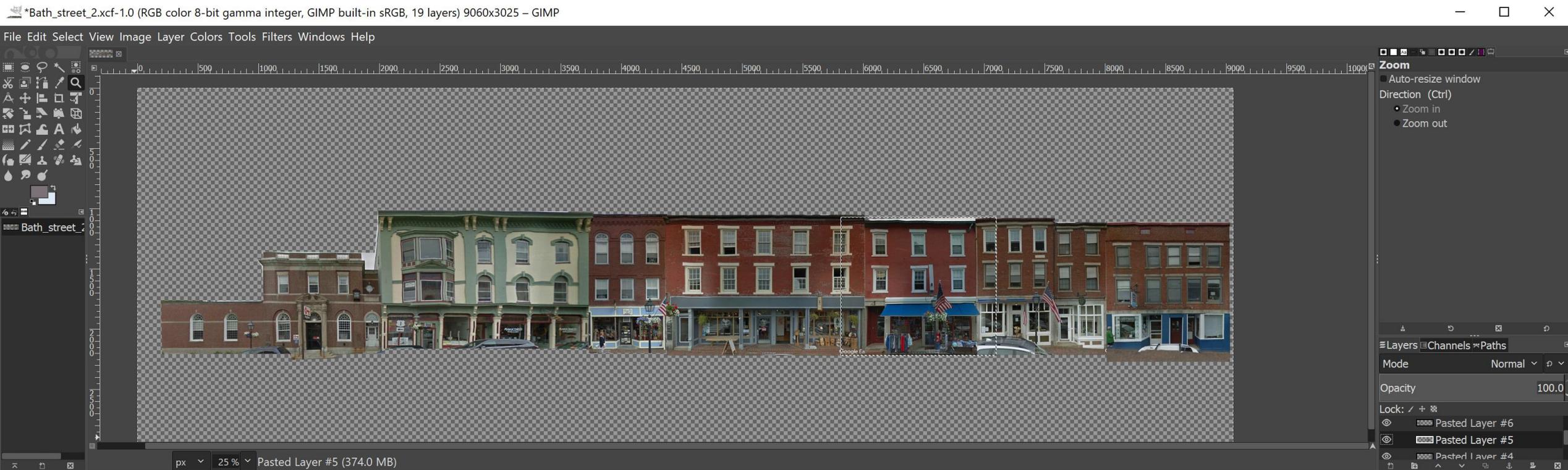
Editing – a backdrop for Bath, ME (2)

- Copy/paste tree panorama from Powerpoint to GIMP
- Remove un-needed features and conform base to foreground topographic profile



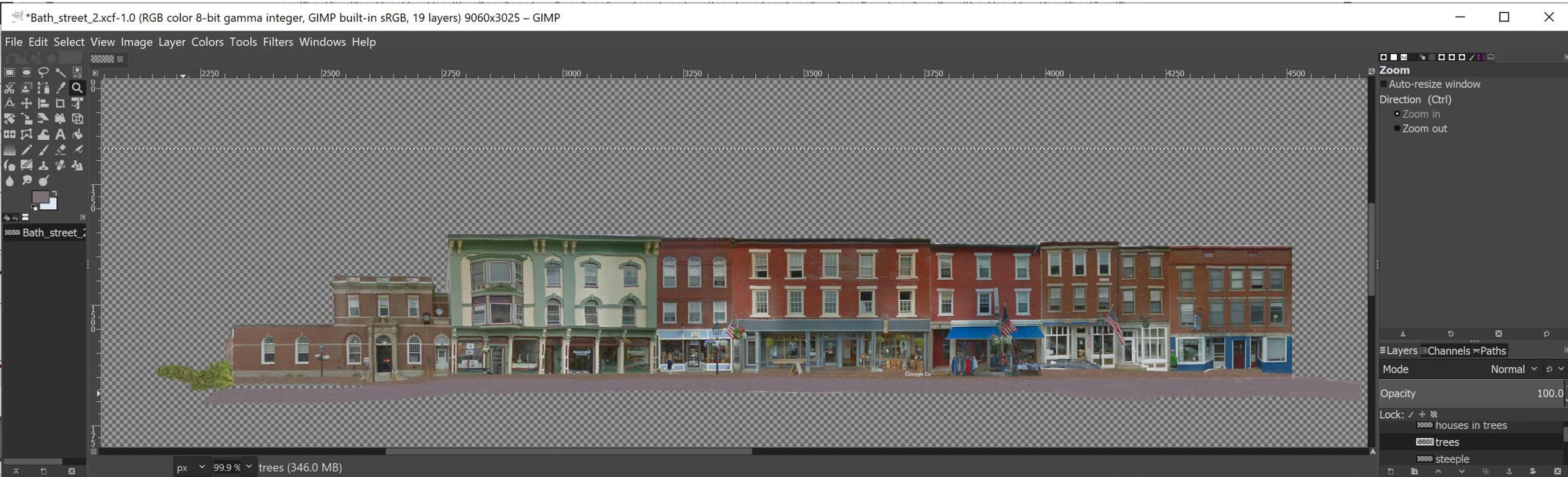
Editing – a backdrop for Bath, ME (3)

- Turn off tree layer
- Capture building images from Google Earth street view
- Import to GIMP as separate layers and scale to match each other



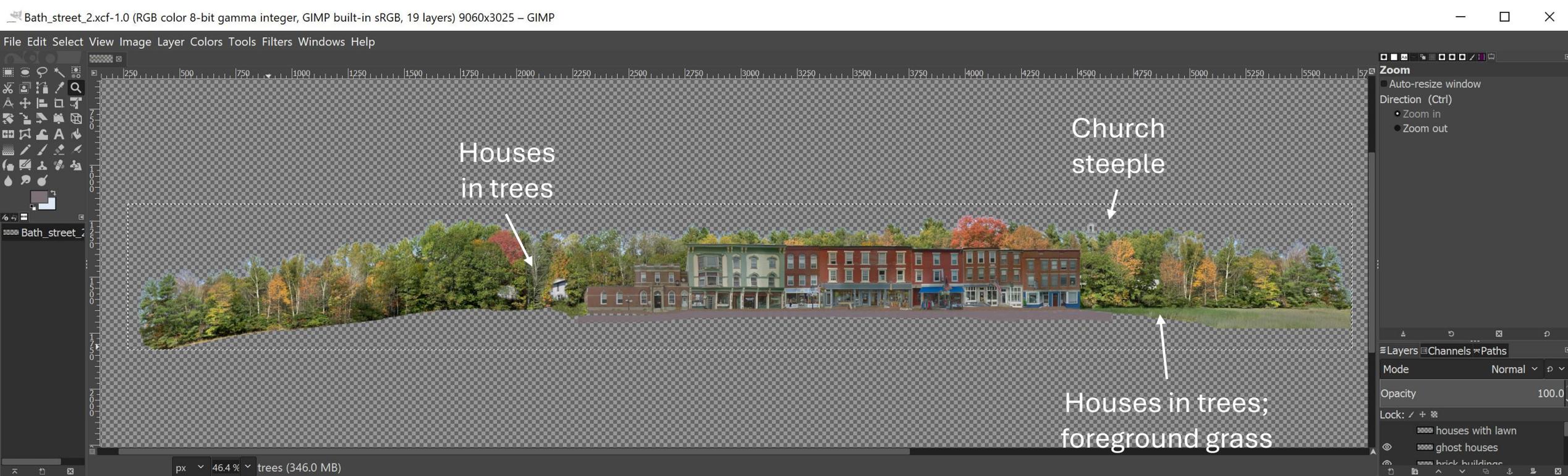
Editing – a backdrop for Bath, ME (4)

- Merge individual building images to new layer
- Edit building layer, using eraser, clone, airbrush, dodge/burn, and other tools.
Result has lightened buildings, removed autos, added sidewalk and street, etc.



Editing – a backdrop for Bath, ME (5)

- Overlay composite building layer in front of tree background
- Scale buildings to match background
- Add a few more details as additional layers



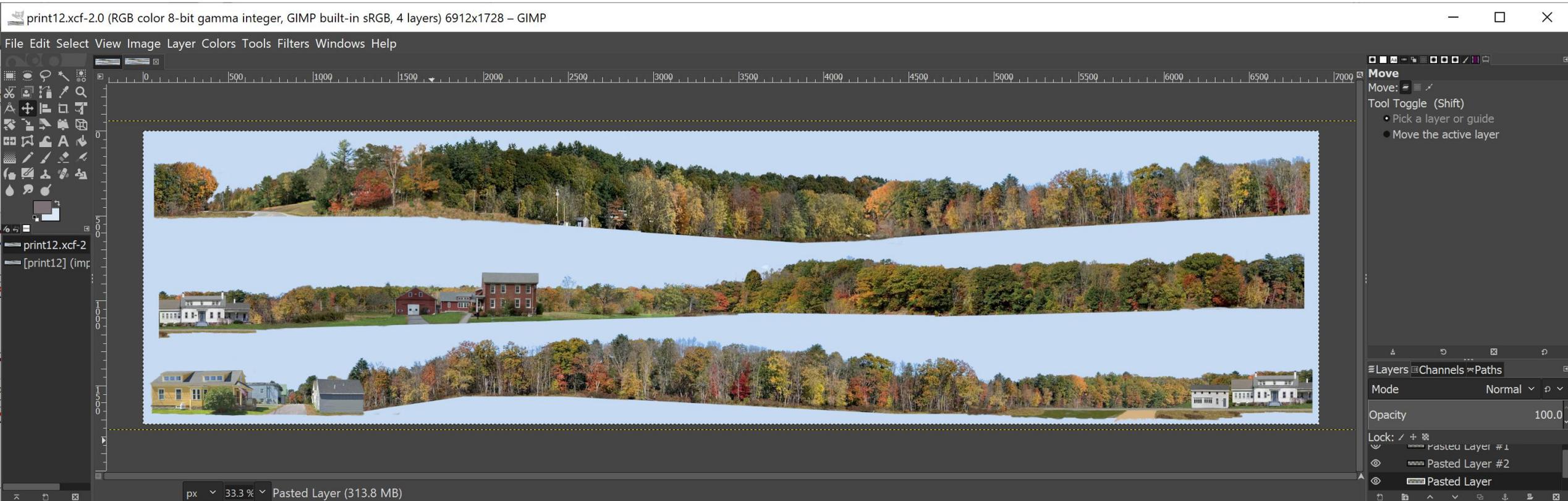
Make test prints and tape
in place to ensure proper fit

Then iterate...



Preparing for printing

- Determine size of paper to be printed on
- Set up a GIMP project with that size of canvas and assemble all the pieces
- Stack images vertically to use as much of the space as possible (2' x 8'; 24' of backdrop per print)
- Export a .jpeg file and submit for printing at full scale



One place to print

[Back to Walmart.com](#) | [Store Finder](#) [My Projects](#) [My Walmart Photos](#) [Upload Photos](#) [Sign In](#)

Walmart Photo [Help](#) [Account](#) [Photo Cart](#) 0

[Rollbacks](#) [Back to College](#) [Pickup Today](#) [Apparel](#) [Graduation](#) [Cards](#) [Prints](#) [Posters](#) [Blankets](#) [Canvas](#) [Wall Art](#) [Photo Books](#) [Drinkware](#) [Home Décor](#) [Gifts](#) [More](#)

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Full Photo



How do you want your item delivered?

Home Delivery Same Day Pickup

Size: 2'X8'

2'X8' 2'X6' 2'X6' With Banner Ups 2'X8' With Banner Ups

\$29.96 [Create Now](#)

Cutting them out



Mounting backdrops to masonite



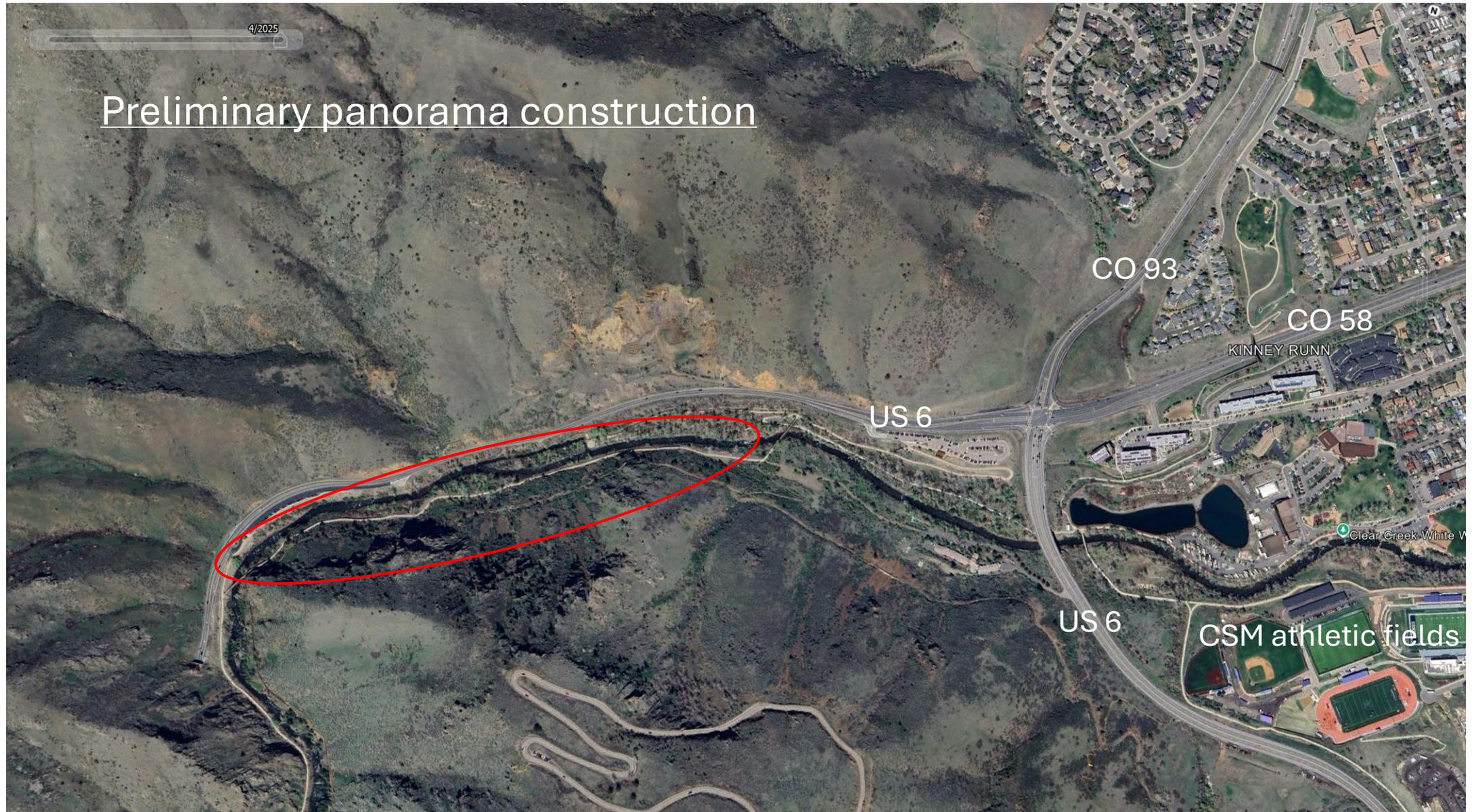
- Pre-paint sky on Masonite
- Mount photos with pre-mixed wallpaper paste
- Roll flush and create clean seams between sections
- Wipe off excess paste with damp sponge
- Seal base with a caulk fillet (not the fish kind)



Bath backdrop in place



Clear Creek example – 1



Preliminary panorama construction

4/2025

CO 93

CO 58

KINNEY RUNN

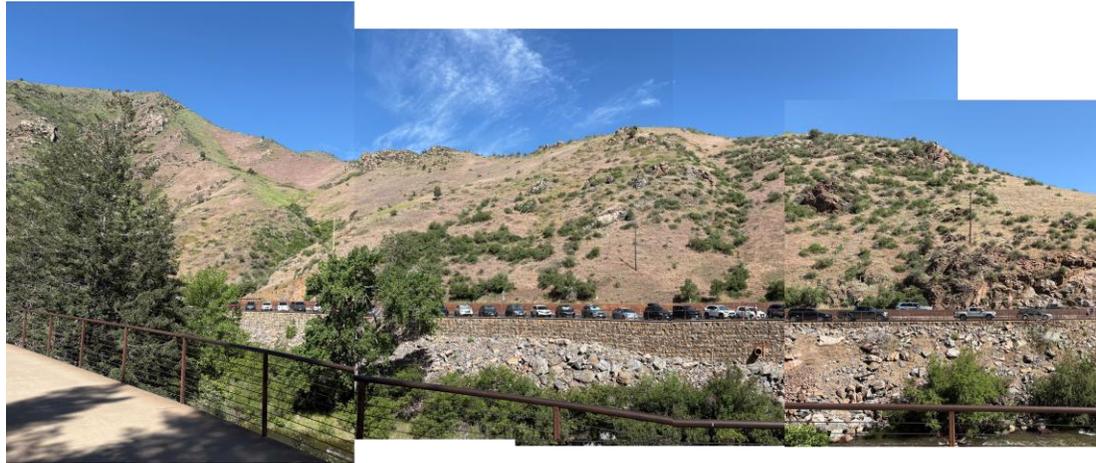
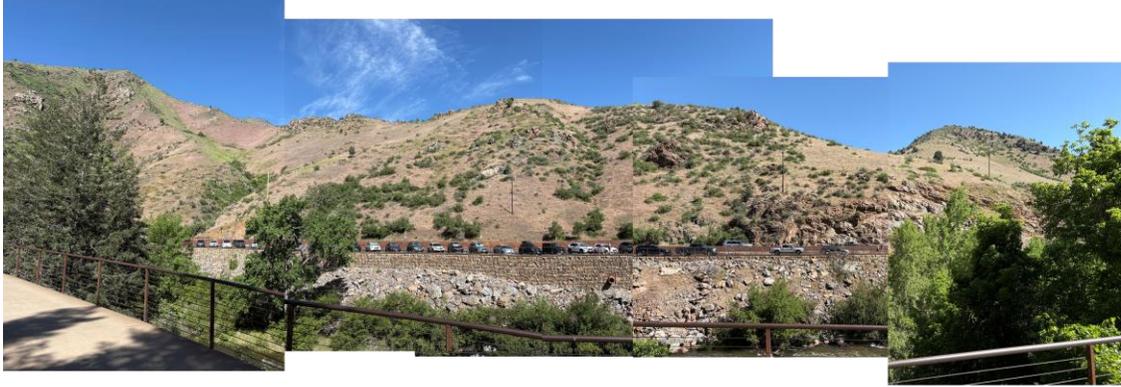
US 6

US 6

CSM athletic fields

Clear Creek White W

Clear Creek example - 2



Clear Creek example - 3

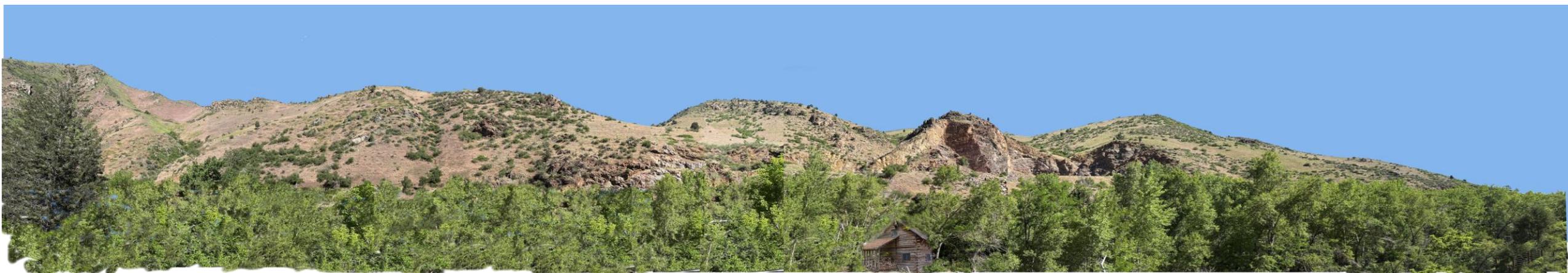
Cropping and distorting

Deleting and cloning

Use clone tool to add trees to lower left side

Adding a log cabin

Before and after



With practice, very little is impossible...



It's not easy, but the benefits are definitely worthwhile!



I stayed in that hotel....